DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 752 SO 012 661

AUTHOR Bray, Charles W., III
TITLE Ascendency and Decline: Are We Exempt?
PUB DATE 11 Apr 80
NOTE 8p.
AVAILABLE FROM International Communication Agency, 1750 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W., Washington, DC 20547 (free)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Area Studies: *Citizenship Responsibility: *Educational Needs: Futures (of Society): *Global Approach: Higher Education: *International Education: Second Language Instruction: *World Problems

ABSTRACT

Given the growing interdependence of the world, programs in world affairs education must be more broadly defined. Presently educational institutions in the United States do not reflect the urgencies of modern international coping. The greatest inadequacy prevails in foreign language preparation. Academic imperatives include instituting and expanding language and area study programs, placing the participant in the center of the learning experience, and bringing together conflicting points of view within a community. Although the Federal government can respond to the problem by placing it on the national agenda and providing modest financial support, no change will take place unless citizens perceive international affairs as a local responsibility. Finally, while interdependence could prove to be a brutal and even mortal phenomenon for our civilization, effective action is within our capacities. (Author/KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

International Communication Agency
United States of America
Washington, D.C. 20547

JUN 1 1980
USICA

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Charles W. Bray III
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED191752

"ASCENDENCY AND DECLINE: ARE WE EXEMPT?"

ADDRESS BY CHARLES W. BRAY III

Deputy Director, International Communication Agency

Seattle, Washington

April 11, 1980

SP 012 661

I think it prudent to assume that, for the first time in our national existence, the issue before us is that of survival.

We've had a free ride since we arrived on the world scene in 1945. We've been able to solve most of our problems the easy way, by overwhelming them with our wealth. We've had the luxury of living as though the lives of men and nations were cost-free. We've not had to confront the unpleasant fact that great civilizations have periods of ascendency, but also periods of decline. We believed we were exempt from history, that God's good grace would protect us. I think it only prudent to assume that the issue before us is that of survival.

We need to confront the reality that those who survive are those who are prepared, those who are willing to invest and to sacrifice for survival.

During the 1970's, it became fashionable — almost a cliche --to describe the world as "interdependent." We know, or have been told time and again, that the world has changed; that its constituent parts have become dependent in ways entirely different from anything we recognized before; that only the relatively minor problems remain national or, rather, that the <u>great</u> national problems cannot be addressed in other than international terms.

We know in some sense -- to some degree -- that these are not merely rhetorical alarms, that they must be true. But the real change is not that the world is interdependent; much of it has always been. The real shift is that for the first time in our national existence, <u>we</u> have become dependent. The fact of dependency shocks us; we have not adjusted to it. And we have much adjusting yet to do.

The facts, of course, tell us that dependency is very much with us. According to a recent "New Yorker" article, the world uses 30,000 gallons of petroleum each second. Of that astounding quantity, this country consumes one third. The United States currently imports more than 30 percent of its petroleum. Yet, a Roper poll taken in January showed that less than 50 percent of the American public is aware of this fact. Even more disturbingly, the misinformed were fairly equally distributed among all segments of the population, including those most active in politics and public affairs.

Old habits of mind die slowly. Beginning with George Washington, Americans have wished to believe that they could avoid foreign entanglements. Former Representative H.R. Gross of Iowa bragged that he had never traveled abroad. His constituents evidently approved; they returned him to the House of Representatives 13 times.

Those "old habits of mind" function like blinders. They prevent us from recognizing all of the potentially unpleasant aspects of an interdependent world. Unpleasant because genuine interdependence suggests a situation for which there is no real precedent in our national experience -- that we are now, for the first time and like most other societies throughout history, at the mercy of important events and decisions beyond our collective grasp.

Our experience and education have taught us to believe that the forces of history were on our side, that we were capable of shaping our own destiny. What if our circumstances have changed and this were not true?

It is not merely that Americans have not yet agreed on the facts of the energy situation, much less come to terms with their potentially mortal implications. What seem to be missing are shared perceptions and perspectives, and an adequate social discourse which would permit us to cope with the darker and potentially fatal side of interdependence.

We are strong as a nation but far from omnipotent, a fact evident to any who know contemporary history. Among the most important lessons of our experiences in Indochina and now in Iran is that we can no longer live by the application of an overwhelming dominance in political, economic, or military power. The implication of this is that we now face the much more difficult task of living by our wits, by our knowledge of others and our skill in dealing with them. The Perkins Commission report served to eliminate any lingering doubts of this.

The Perkins Commission also raised the important question: what are we prepared to do about our situation? How well equipped are we to make an effective response to it?

As the Commission demonstrated, the answer is that we are woefully unprepared to respond effectively:

Other evidence is equally discouraging. Consider:

-- during 1968-77, a period during which we became more dependent on exports for jobs, enrollments in colleges and university foreign language courses dropped 21 percent.

-- only one in twenty undergraduates enrolls in courses dealing with foreign peoples and cultures.

-- one quarter of each new dollar of direct investment goes abroad.

-- yet only about one percent of college and university faculty members go abroad each year.

-- and fewer than two percent of high school graduates have any foreign language competence.

-- a 1977 survey of 3,800 Ph.D. and DBA graduates showed that 75 percent had no international business courses during their graduate studies, only 10 percent had even one.

-- fewer than 8 percent of U.S. colleges impose foreign language requirements, and only half of these institutions require a foreign language for graduation.

American education for over 100 years has been isolationist in its contexts, centered around the concerns of a growing nation. Harlan Cleveland states the problem well: "It has been hard enough to try to prepare the nation's youth for responsive and responsible positions in local and national affairs. Now the system is asked to help young Americans become responsive and responsible citizens of an interdependent world. The new assignment," he said," would be ridiculous if it were not also imperative."

With some exceptions -- and I bow to the exciting exceptions of the schools and colleges of Seattle and of Washington state -- our educational institutions are caught up in curricula and degree requirements that do not reflect the urgencies of modern international coping. Unless something is done to compensate for these educational deficiencies, the United States will continue to lack the expert human resources to steer American public and private enterprises through the international waters that lie ahead.

Our use of expert human resources in foreign policy is at best uneven. President Kennedy called on Ambassadors Charles Bohlen and Llewellyn Thompson for advice in dealing with the Soviet Union during the Cuban missile crisis. We can now be grateful to Bohlen's counsel against a military strike in Cuba. But before our involvement in Indochina, we had not a single American-born specialist in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos in any of our universities. Even today, we do not have in the United States a center of advanced studies about Vietnam.

Our "gross-national inadequacy in foreign languages," as James Perkins wrote, continues to affect our foreign affairs. For example, only 6 of 60 U.S. Foreign Service Officers in Iran during the revolutionary year of 1978 were minimally proficient in Farsi; for much of that year, the political section had no one fluent in Farsi, and at the time of the takeover only two members of the staff were fluent.

In Afghanistan, the first two U.S. Embassy employees at the scene of Ambassador Adolph Dubs' kidnapping and subsequent murder did not speak Dari. In Pakistan, only 5 of the 32 U.S. Foreign Service Officers formerly posted to Islamabad were required to be minimally proficient in Urdu. In the Soviet Union, only one of our top officers is required to speak Ukrainian; none speak Uzbek or any of the other Turkic languages spoken by the USSR's increasingly restive Moslem peoples. A total of 12 Foreign Service Officers have Chinese at a truly useful level, while only 19 are at this level in Japanese. None is fully fluent. On the legislative side, there is no full-time Soviet and East European area specialist on a Congressional committee staff.

The roots of these troubling facts are not hard to trace. On the one hand, a 1979 Rand Corporation report on international studies and the marketplace found that government foreign affairs agencies do not make effective use of the specialists they recruit. Career incentives encourage people to become generalists, not specialists. On the other hand, our educational system is not producing enough graduates, well enough trained, for government to hire. Fifteen years ago, my agency and the Department stopped providing bonus points on the entrance examination for those who were language-qualified. They constituted such a minority that the practice was deemed discriminatory. The result? Only 25% of the young Foreign Service Officers entering our agency in the past two years has had even minimum fluency in a foreign language -- only one in four!

Afghanistan and Iran may prove to be the 1980s version of Sputnik --events which kindle American interest in coping more effectively with the outside world. But we cannot again wind down our interest in foreign cultures as we seemed to do following Vietnam. The lead-time involved in preparing a generation of area specialists is substantially greater than that needed for a new series of ballistic missiles. Because world events have become a permanent part of our domestic agenda, our preparation for involvement in that world must be consistent and continuous, not dependent on crises like Sputnik or Iran.

We seem to have evolved an educational system and job market that place premiums on specialized, employment-oriented skills and that pay comparatively less attention to the development of worldwide perspectives.

That same Rand report is illustrative. Its authors noted that few of the business people they interviewed showed great interest in language capability alone as a criterion for hiring. Perhaps most discouraging, neither government nor business showed much inclination to change their hiring requirements, internal training policies, or overseas assignment practices to give more weight to language competence.

This litany of disturbing facts and shortcomings in our foreign language and affairs competence is not a counsel of despair. Rather, it should be a basis for action.

You here in Seattle and throughout the state of Washington are well ahead of the rest of us. Indeed, your work could be a model for our nation in meeting the problem. You have here, in people like Rosanne Royer, Paul McKrill, Ken Pyle, Keith Crosby and others, the kind of concerned, interested citizens who can, and do, bring about real change. They and others have done wonderful work, but they cannot do it alone.

The Federal government can help by acknowledging the problem, placing it on the national agenda, and providing modest financial support. The role of my own Agency in international education might best be described as that of a "friendly broker," alert to matching up individuals, institutions, programs and resources abroad with their counterparts in this country.

But government can only do so much. It cannot internationalize American education.

The important decisions must be made at state and local levels. This is fundamentally a civic problem; it will respond to citizen interests. But there will be no meaningful, continuous support for international education or language study until citizens perceive international affairs as a local responsibility -- something that affects each one of them.

If there be a city and a state in this country where the foreigner's affairs directly affect those who live "at home," it is Seattle and it is the state of Washington.

Nationwide, one job in every six depends on exports; here the ratio is closer to one in four. Washington is 22nd in population, but sixth in total foreign trade. Seattle is the second largest container port in the United States. Fifty percent of all commercial aircraft flying anywhere in the world were manufactured here. The University of Washington's School of International Affairs is known nationally and internationally for its fine work in Asian, Soviet, and Japanese studies.

Yet I am told the Port of Seattle does not have a staff person with Chinese, Japanese or Indonesian language ability. The Weyerhauser Company, with 35% of its business in exports gives no special attention to language training of its employees. Your lumber, pulp, fish and fruits go to ports in Asia and elswhere. The secondary school enrollment for Japanese and Chinese language instruction here, while better than the national norm, should be much higher.

Clearly there is much yet to be done. Certainly you have the interest and talent.

We are at a pivotal point in our history. We are late in realizing it. We must begin, now, to think and talk about a world where hard choices must be made, where basic human values must be better understood and more carefully responded to, where our decisions must be shaped by a consistent, knowledgeable commitment to the future.

Building appropriate educational systems is a long-range task. Just as imperative is the need to find and support palliative measures in the short-term.

For me the palliative, and here I quote Robert Chollar of the Kettering Foundation, is "to preserve the involvement and expand the understanding of the minority who are attentive to international relations."

Our future would be well-rewarded if, acting together, you here and we in the Federal Government, and others who share our concerns, could find ways to support and encourage those in this country who are intellectually engaged with international issues. The importance of providing them adequate, continuing support in the national interest cannot be overstated.

I am talking about a group which can be numbered in the hundreds of thousands rather than in the millions: people such as you who are working together to establish an agenda for follow-up activities to the Perkins Commission report.

It is to you, I believe, that we must look for that minimum cadre of informed and critical intellects -- and resulting social discourse -- to see us through the next generation.

The sums of money involved, while surely greater than those which have been forthcoming from either private or public sources in the past decade, are not beyond our collective capacity.

What criteria ought one to bring to bear on competing demands for resources?

I favor support for many -- not all, but many -- of the programs which already exist in the field of world affairs education broadly defined. At the academic level, one can begin with language and area study programs. One can envisage a variety of programs for emerging political leaders, some of which we support.

I would suggest three additional criteria. The first would be a straightforward argument for support of those programs in world affairs which emphasize a serious learning process. Second, we should support those programs which put the participant at the center of the learning process, broadly defined; too many seem to me to leave him or her on the receiving end of a lecture. Third, the most potent learning experiences are those which bring together conflicting points of view within a community. It seems to me important that people and groups understand that they are not in sole possession of wisdom and that the political process in our system is, in its outcome, a brokered solution.

In short, I believe it prudent to consider the following possibilities:

— that "interdependence" could prove to be a brutal and even mortal phenomenon for our civilization;

— that we are not now, as a society, prepared to cope with the implications of that possibility;

— that in the absence of informed opinion our public policy responses must necessarily be deficient;

— that the ultimate solution is beyond the capacities of any of the individuals or institutions in this room;

— but, finally and most importantly, there is, nonetheless, an effective if only partially remedial action which is within our joint capacities.

However real the impediments to an effective response, and they exist, we cannot afford to turn away from involvement.

Education that teaches us to celebrate rather than condemn cultural diversity, to understand rather than undermine differing traditions and beliefs, to respect rather than revile mankind's infinite variations —such education may not be enough to preserve our precarious perch on the favorable side of history, but surely the effort must be made. I am reminded of what a UN official said some time ago when he noted that a child born today into a world of four billion plus people will, if she or he attains age 60, be sharing the earth with three times as many human beings: "A child born today," he said," will be both actor and beneficiary, or victim, in a total world fabric, and he may rightly ask: Why was I not warned? Why was I not better educated. Why did my teachers not tell me about these problems?"

Why, indeed? What greater default than this: that we should fail to warn our children?

As Walter Lippman once reminded us: "You took the good things for granted. Now you must earn them again....There is nothing for nothing any longer."

There is truly nothing for nothing any longer. Can we cope with that fact? Will we?